

Interviewed by Kathleen Irving, 19 April 2002
Transcribed by Marilyn Hunting, 29 April 2002

Kathleen Irving (KI): I am with Arden Stewart today, 19 April 2002. He is going to tell us stories about ferries and other river-related things.

Arden Stewart (Arden): The story begins back about 1916-18, I'm not sure of the date. My father, Hank Stewart, and his brother, George, and another man were working a copper mine on the end of Leland Bench, which is down river from the little Indian trading post of Ouray about four or five miles. He and the other man were also in partners on a ferry boat that was located at Tijuana Bottoms at Tijuana Crossing, which is down river from Ouray about five miles on the Green River, down below where White River, Green River and the Duchesne River all come together. They were working a copper mine and eventually Dad bought this partner out and he took the boat over himself. The mine didn't amount to too much, so they gave that up and he run the ferry boat there for a number of years. There were quite a few incidents that happened.

His prime business was the crossing of sheep in the fall and in the spring. A lot of the people that went to the summer and winter ranges went across through there on the ferry boat. That was the only way to get their sheep across the river. That was his main business, so he would cross those people on horseback or if someone came with a wagon, or even a car, he could take them across. He charged one cent a head for sheep. I believe it was fifty cents for a man on his horse, one dollar for a wagon to cross the river.

The way the ferry boat was set up, it was a double-bottomed boat, flat-bottomed boat, wide enough that you could put a team and wagon on with no problem and long enough. It had a four-foot railing around it with walkways on the outside of the railing. It had a flooring and underneath there was a space, then the bottom of the boat. The boat was built just exactly the same on the front and back. It came along flat, then turned up. He had his main cable running all the way across the river. It was one-and-a-half-inch cable. It was anchored to a deadman on each side of the river. They had a large pulley on that and in this pulley was a smaller cable that came down to the boat. On one end of the boat it was secured solid and on the other end was on a windlass or a winch, hand winch.

This is the way they would cross the river. They would turn the boat. Whichever way they wanted to go, that end of the boat would be upstream. The current of the river would push that boat across. 'Course they used poles to prod it along, too. Anyway, they also had aprons on the front of each end of the boat so when they got to the embankment they would anchor the boat, tie it down to the anchors, then drop these aprons and go on and off the boat without any problems.

He ran the boat there for a number of years and then business kind of changed and the people wanted him to move down to an area that is known as Sand Wash. This was about thirty-five miles down river from Tijuana and it was down in Hill Creek, down in Nine Mile area. A lot of sheepmen, cattlemen, and ranchers down there wanted to use that crossing so they could go either to Price or over to Myton to do their business. Also, the sheepmen wanted to cross down there, rather than at Tijuana. There was a little bit of trouble with the Ute Tribe over the Tijuana

Bottom because of an Indian allotment in there. There was some bad feelings over that; about them crossing in that area that belonged to the Indians.

He gathered up his boat and got everything ready and floated that boat down the river by himself, he and mother. He had married Mother by then. They floated the boat down the river and got to Sand Wash, got it secured, put in the abutment, put in the deadman, put in everything, and got the boat running and lived in a tent. This was in about 1922 or '23. That winter when everything froze up they didn't need to use the boat anymore, they could cross on ice.

He took a bobsled and a team and went back up the river to the old cabin. They had a three- or four-room cabin at Tijuana; he marked the logs, tore the cabin down, put it on the bobsled. He had to make three or four trips and hauled it down to Sand Wash and rebuilt it. The old cabin is still standing there to day. It is partially filled up with silt and sand and stuff because of the flooding that comes down Sand Wash. Sand Wash floods real bad if there's a thunderstorm across that country. They lived in that cabin and in 1925 I was born.

We lived there till I was about four or five and he sold the ferry boat to a guy by the name of Chuck Sam. We moved back to the old ranch, the old homestead, that my grandfather, my mother's dad, owned, south of Ouray; where Willow Creek intersects with Green River. We bought the old ranch from him and moved there.

We ranched there and in the spring of 1937, May 23, Dad and one of the hired hands, a guy by the name of Tom McKenna, from over at Myton, went across the river. It was high water time; that was before we had dams like Flaming Gorge. The water would get real high; and it was very high and swift. They went across in a rowboat and got a corn planter. He was going to put in a big field of corn.

KI: Where did they row across?

Arden: Right at Tijuana. Right where the old ferry boat used to be. Tom was a big stout guy and he was rowing the boat because he was stronger than Dad. Dad was getting old, he was in his sixties.

KI: What was on the other side?

Arden: Harry Aumiller had a corn planter and they were going to buy it or borrow it from him. So they rowed across the river, loaded the corn planter in the boat and it put down in the water pretty good, and then on their way back a whirlpool hit them and sucked the boat down and Dad was standing in the middle of the machinery and when they came up, Dad was unconscious. Tom, came up and grabbed hold of the boat. It had turned over, but the bow was filled with air and was floating; he grabbed it and when Dad came up, he grabbed him. Mother jumped on her horse and was going to go out and try and help them. Chuck Sand grabbed the horse's bridle and wouldn't let it go or she would probably have drowned with them. Then the boat sank, it was kind of a leaky, old boat. Tom tried to swim out with Dad; he probably could have swam out by himself, but he tried to get Dad out and they went both went under and we never saw them for another seven days. They both drowned. Tom left his wife and a year old and little six-month old baby.

Ironically, where Dad owned his first ferry boat, years later, he came back and that is where he was drowned.

KI: What other children did he have?

Arden: I'm an only child. He had three older children by another marriage. My mother didn't have any because she was really young when they were married.

That's the story of the Hank Stewart ferry and some of the things that happened on the river. Or the Tijuana Ferry or the Sand Wash Ferry. Dad lived along the river nearly all his life and couldn't swim a lick. It wouldn't mattered, he was knocked out anyway.

Ironically also, his best friend, Matt Curry, who used to own the old "Curry Manor", he built that house. He owned the trading post in Ouray. Dad and he were *very* good friends, best friends. He was down there on the search. There were a lot of people searching for the bodies, and it was Matt Curry that found Dad. He wasn't down stream less than a quarter of a mile, Tom McKenna less than that. He was found the same day in a pile of driftwood. They had both floated. They wrapped him in a tarp and Matt said, "Put him in the back of my car." He wouldn't let anyone come with him and he brought him to Vernal.

As a twelve-year-old boy, it was tragic in my life. It was really tragic for Ma, I remember what she went through. But for a twelve-year-old boy it wasn't really dramatic. I lost my father, yeah, but you know. We were able to save the ranch. We had to sell all the cattle and everything to pay the ranch off, but we did that. Mother remarried, and we made it and did quite well. The memories now, as I get older, I get kind of soft. Memories mean an awfully lot and I get a little sentimental.

KI: Did you have any experiences that you remember when you were a little boy playing by the river?

Arden: Yes, I nearly drowned three times. Green River is a treacherous river, a lot of people don't know that. Green River has a very strong undercurrent. An undercurrent is, the river looks calm on top, but underneath it is really a turmoil. It's notorious for that. It has drowned people here ever since we've lived on it. I got into one of those one day and dang near didn't get out.

Another time, we used to swim the river wherever we came to it with our horses, because our horses were river horses and they knew how to swim and they weren't afraid of water. I got out in the middle and my horse got in trouble and got to floundering and so I jumped off and grabbed my lariat, it was tied to my saddle horn. I went out to the end of my lariat and gave him a better chance to get out. He made it on out to the bank and stopped. So, I'm out on the end of this forty-foot lariat, still in the river. It was too deep to touch bottom. Finally, I was able to swim around and get on the bank and get out.

Another time, I and my cousin, I know darn well the Good Lord had his arm around us that day, we were swimming. We swam every day when we were down there. There was this big cottonwood tree that had tipped over and the river was going around it on both sides. There was a sandbar here and out there was a tree and the river was going around it. As kids would do, we wanted to get out on that tree. We looked it over and we debated and finally he saw a root sticking up off that tree. He said, "Oh, there's a root. I can jump and grab that." So he jumped and grabbed it and it was a piece of driftwood and he went under. So instinctively, I just jumped in and grabbed him and the current was sucking us down under that tree, because it was pulling real hard. He was fighting, terrible. He was completely out of it. I finally got him off from me

and got back out and got my breathe. He was floundering some more and I went back in the second time and he did the same thing, he got right on top of me. That time something says, "Go to the bottom." So, I went clear down to the bottom and got my feet into the sand and then I struggled and walked up out of the water and brought him with me. He coughed up river water for an hour. It scared both of us to death. I was probably about thirteen and he was about ten or eleven.

KI: Can you think of any really good times you had on the river?

Arden: We had all kind of good times. We used to go to the Bear Dance every spring at Ouray. Everybody from out on the Creek, that's Willow Creek and Hill Creek, would come in and we would all camp down there and have a good time. We did a lot of fishing. We would catch catfish. We used to catch those big ole squaw fish, those big ol' white fish. They're pretty well extinct now, but we used to catch those quite often, mostly catfish. In fact, that was part of our diet. We subsisted on catfish a lot of the time. They're real good eating.

Oh, there is just something about the old river and the river bottom that is intriguing. I love it down there; still go back every chance I get.

They used to put up ice in the wintertime. They'd go down to the river and when the ice would get real thick they would cut it with the ice saw. Put it on a bobsled and haul it up and put it in the icehouse. We used Gilsonite as an insulator. We had a log house, it was full of Gilsonite. There was a small Gilsonite vein not far from our ranch house. It was in the mouth of Willow Creek, about a mile and a quarter up from the river. They just put that ice in there and packed it with snow in between the blocks, then cover it with a layer of Gilsonite and add another layer of ice. It would last all summer. We used it to make ice cream, in our drinking water. We even had an ice box. We could keep our milk and cream and butter in the ice box. We'd put a piece of ice in there.

KI: How long did you live on Willow Creek?

Arden: We owned three different ranches. After Mother and Jack Brewer were married, we lived there until the early '40s. Then we sold that place and they bought another place up farther up Willow Creek. They bought the old Harry Brown place, up above Hatches'. We lived there for ten to fifteen years. Then they sold that and bought another place over on Bitter Creek, which is over in the Book Cliffs and up higher.

KI: How does Allen Brewer fit in there?

Arden: Allen is a full brother to my step-dad, Jack. He was the second oldest one in the Frank Brewer family and Jack was the second to the youngest. There was five kids. That's how we ended up over there; he bought that place from his dad, Frank. We were there for a number of years, probably fifteen or so, then they sold that and moved into town to send the kids to school. Then he just went to work as a cowboy around for different ones. He bought a forty- acre farm out south of here.

KI: Where did you go to school?

Arden: Well, I always had to board out to go to school. We didn't have any school. Eva taught out there, Eva Ashton [Eva Stewart Ashton, his half-sister] taught out there for a while. There were two different schools out there; one was on Hill Creek and on Willow Creek, and then when they quit, they had to send us somewhere. The first year my cousin and I stayed at the ranch, there by Ouray and had a tutor and she taught us all. That was my first love. I just fell in love with her. She was a red-headed gal, just out of college. I really fell in love with her. That was my first year. The second year I moved into Vernal and stayed with Sadie Blank. That was a rancher from out there. That was Willis Stevens' mother. He was an old-timer from out there. I stayed with her and went to school in Vernal. Then the next three years I stayed with an aunt and went to school in Myton. That is where I was going to school when Dad was drowned. I was just getting ready to leave school. When the word came, I was in Myton.

The next three years I went to Wasatch Academy at Mt. Pleasant, which is a Presbyterian boarding school. Then I went to Oregon, but then my high school was interrupted with the war, so then I joined the Navy and spent three years there. I didn't graduate. I went just after I was eighteen and had another year to go. I didn't spend much time at home when I was in school.

Oh, I missed the sixth grade. Sixth grade I went to Leota. I was in the fifth grade in Myton when Dad was drowned. In the sixth grade, we were still on the ranch, Mom and I. We had one hired hand. Like I said, we had to sell all our cows to pay off the debt. When Dad was drowned, everybody wanted their money immediately. So we sold every cow we had. We had probably two hundred head of really good Hereford cows. We sold all and paid off the ranch and then we had a ranch with nothing.

So, a good part of the winter I rode my horse from the ranch to Ouray six miles, put the horse in the barn and fed him, and got on a bus and went another eight miles up to Leota to school. We had two teachers for eight grades. We had the first, second, third, and fourth on this side of the building and had the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth over on this side of the building. We sat in rows, by grades. We had two teachers. After school I would get on the bus, go back to Ouray, get on my horse and go home, help do chores. I can remember leaving in the dead of night, dark, on my horse and getting home in the dark. Later on, before the winter was over, Mother got a job in Ouray. They had an old boarding house down there at that time. They had cabins that you could rent. Some of the ranchers or stockman, people going through there, would stay overnight. They had a boarding house that would serve meals. She was hired as the cook; so we moved from the ranch to there. We kept the ranch. Then after she and Jack were married in December of 1938, they started building the ranch back up.

We lived off the land. They [government officials] paid bounty on bobcats, coyotes and things. We would get those, sell the fur, chase wild horses. If it was a good horse we'd break him out and sell him, if he wasn't a good horse we would sell it Milas Colton for his mink farm for fox feed. Raise everything in our own garden. We had chickens and pigs and things like that. We were pretty self-sufficient. This was just right, as the Depression was starting the end. It was in '37, '38, '39, on in there. The times were hard.

KI: Do you remember the drought that happened during that time?

Arden: Thirty-seven. Yeah, a little bit, not much.

KI: It must not have affected you too much, then.

Arden: Naw, it wasn't bad. We had a really terrible bad, cold winter one time. We lost a lot of our cows. We had a whole bunch of dogie calves that we raised. I remember I used to have to milk, then feed the milk to the calves. It would drive me to no end! Sit there for hours milking those old cows, then give it to the calves. But we saved the calves and sold them that fall.

KI: Is it because the mothers wouldn't take them?

Arden: The mothers died. A cow won't take a strange calf, very seldom will it, if that calf doesn't have the right smell. That's the way they tell, they smell the calf. If it has her smell, she'll take it, if not, she won't. Once in a while we could fool them by skinning out the dead calf and putting the dead calf's skin on the live calf, the dogie calf and giving it to the mother. If she smelled it and accepted that hide, then after two or three times we'd take the hide off and it would be okay. But that's about the only way you could do it. But it worked. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't.

KI: Do you ever remember taking dates down by the river?

Arden: No. I never did.

KI: It was a guy thing, huh?

Arden: Yeah, it was a guy thing mostly. Well, there were some gals out there on the creek that I kind of liked, but I didn't do too much with any of them.

KI: You didn't all just go down as a group?

Arden: Once in a while some of them would come down and we'd all go to the river and go on a swimming party or something. I've got a real good picture of a swimming party in here somewhere. There's Dad and ?, my uncle. But anyway, if they came down and wanted to go to the river and swim, cool off, why, we'd do that.

Another time, Reed Birchell, do you know Reed Birchell? You know Representative Dan Price's wife, her dad and mom, they lived the next ranch above us, ten miles up. One year they bought a bunch of turkeys, he raised a bunch of turkeys. The creek went dry and they had no water, so he came down and made a deal with Dad for us to take care of the turkeys. Then we could sell them in the fall and split money, or whatever. I don't know what kind of a deal he made, but it fell to me to be the turkey herder and I was a cowboy. I thought I was really a good cowboy. I had a horse and dog and a gun. And Dad said, "You're going to herd those turkeys!" I said, "You've gotta be kiddin' me." And those crazy things, they are the craziest birds in the world. They're nuts. They'd get to chasin' grasshoppers and things and go down through that brush. I had to stay with them because there were a lot of coyotes around and the dang coyotes would get them if you wasn't right there with them. Then every night I'd have to herd them up, gather them all up, bring them in, make sure they got on the top pole of the corral, so the coyotes couldn't get them at night, and that was my summer's job. And I hated it. I don't like turkeys

today! But things like that happened and everyone was neighborly, good friends, good neighbors.

At the old schoolhouse, up by Hatches, they'd have a dance every once in a while. Everybody'd go. They'd dance all night long. Put the kids to bed on benches and everybody would bring cake and sandwiches and stuff and when it come daylight, why, it was time to go home then. They would all go back and start putting up hay or whatever they were doing. It was a different life. A whole different life.

KI: Thanks so much for talking with me today.

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